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291349Z Oct 03

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 007000

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2013

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SUBJECT: ISLAMISTS WELCOME KING'S CALL FOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

REF: AMMAN 06812

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The Jordanian Islamic Action Front (IAF) publicly embraced King Abdullah's call for political development and a more democratic elections law. The IAF sees the current electoral system as limiting its power in Parliament and hopes to capitalize on political reform measures to expand its influence. End Summary.

WE'RE DEMOCRATS TOO!

12. (U) As reported reftel, King Abdullah recently outlined his goals for the incoming government of Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez, including a new emphasis on political development. The letter specifically mentioned the drafting of a "democratic elections law" prior to parliamentary elections currently slated for 2007.

13. (U) The IAF, political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, hailed the King's call for greater democracy and political pluralism. In a press interview October 26, Abdul Latif Arabiyat, president of the IAF Shura Council, said that it was "very good that the King gave such clear instructions. We hope that the government will follow them." He further stated that, "We are ready to negotiate, we remain open-minded, we are ready to cooperate with the new government."

14. (U) Arabiyat also welcomed the smaller size of the new cabinet, downsized from 29 to 21 ministers. "Twenty is good, I wish they were 15, God willing!," commented the IAF leader.

ELECTIONS LAW CONTROVERSY

15. (C) One of the main IAF priorities is the scrapping of the provisional one-person, one-vote elections law adopted without Parliament's approval in 2001 and which governed the June 2003 parliamentary elections. According to the IAF and many political analysts, the tribal nature of Jordanian society prompts many voters to cast their sole ballot on the basis of family, rather than ideological, considerations. If Jordanians could cast two votes in multi-member constituencies, the IAF contends, they would cast the first for a member of their tribe and the second for the candidate who most closely reflects their political views.

16. (C) Believing that a two-vote system would increase its representation in Parliament, the IAF is considering presenting a proposal, with the support of other opposition parties, to change the current elections law. In addition to two votes for each voter, the IAF is reportedly weighing inclusion of a quota for political parties in its elections law proposal. The IAF also hopes that "democratic reforms" would extend to other representative institutions. According to Arabiyat, "We need to focus on the principles that govern all elections, for Parliament, university student councils, municipalities or other bodies."

COMMENT

17. (C) The IAF will undoubtedly seek to capitalize on the King's call for political reforms for its own benefit. While Arabiyat's comments suggest that the IAF may adopt a relatively conciliatory approach in its initial dealings with the new government, it will not hesitate to resort to a more confrontational stance to further its agenda. Parliamentary debate on the future of the provisional elections law should prove a key IAF battleground.

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GNEHM